

The Read Campaign, Societal Values and National Development

G. Olu Oyinloye

Department of Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
E-mail: Olugaby@yahoo.com

KEYWORDS Attitude. Reading. Literacy. Societal Values. Mother Tongue. National Development

ABSTRACT This study investigates the importance of reading and its influence on the societal values. Descriptive survey method was used to elicit information from two hundred literate adults. The study attempts to find out if reading especially in the mother tongue will influence the development of positive attitude to societal values, make readers shun anti societal value behaviours and identify the desirable societal values. The findings of the study show that students can gain a lot from reading and can identify the values of their society and other societies. It also indicates that readers are being influenced either positively or negatively by the materials they have read. The findings show that pupils can develop positive attitudes towards societal values or shun undesirable values if they are exposed to reading materials in their mother tongue. It was recommended among other things that teachers should teach students and encourage students to read materials written in their mother tongues. Teachers should endeavour to draw out the moral lessons in the texts studied by the students.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is central to learning and it is a useful skill in retrieving information. It is a receptive skill just like listening in conversation. Its activity is characterized by the translations of symbol or letters into words and sentences that have meaning to the individual. The ultimate goal of reading is to be able to understand written material, to evaluate it, and to use it for one's needs. Reading therefore is learnt and not acquired naturally.

Reading is an integral aspect of literacy. In most cases, literacy is described as a technical capability to decode or reproduce written or printed signs, symbols, or letters combined into words. Literacy means different things to different people. Initially, it was conceived as ability to read and write, as the society grows with expansion of technology, literacy became an amorphous terms. It is seen as ability to read, and to calculate. A literate person in this sense is a person who can communicate effectively through reading and writing, hence all the language skills are involved that is, speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Literacy in the view of Hillerich (1998) is the demonstration of competence in communication skills which enables the individual to function appropriately in his/her age, independently in his/her society and with potential for progress in that society. From the above, literacy is seen as a veritable tool in national development. Literacy grows with modern development hence, there are different forms of literacy such as com-

puter, mathematical and graphic literacy. People need a combination of many different forms of literacy to meet the demands of modern life. Literacy is not an inborn human characteristics but rather an ability that is learnt most often in schools.

Literacy and reading are close associates and a nation needs to intensify her efforts at making her citizens literate in order to achieve meaningful development. Reading is a catalyst to national development. The issue of national development is the concern of many patriots in every nation. National development as used in this study means growth or advancement of a nation. It connotes state of growth or development. Development is necessary in all aspects of human endeavour. National development can be described as a change which involves movement from one point to another point in national life. Roland (1992) says that national development implies control in that change can be induced or modified and may result to measures deliberately combined to achieve a projected goal. Literacy becomes a veritable tool in this regard because it can be used to induce change which will lead to the achievement of national development. Hale (1993) asserts that national development is a democratic process and every individual in the society has to participate. In this sense, literacy with specific focus on reading becomes a useful tool which could be used to arouse and awaken the people in order to secure the much needed enthusiastic participation in the course of nation building. The growth of any nation is

closely related to the societal values. Worthwhile values will result to rapid national development. Value in this study is considered as the importance or usefulness of moral principles and beliefs. For instance, Nigerians believe in moral uprightness and truthfulness in all human endeavours. Nigerians also believe in doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong as much as it is humanly possible. A literate person will be able to read about the value of his/her society and other parts of the World.

The Problem

The trend of development in the world today revealed that for one to take part in an industrialised society one has to acquire far more than basic literacy. People with minimal literacy skills may be described as functional “illiterates” that is they are unable to use a variety of skills beyond the reading and writing of simple sentences. A functionally literate individual is perceived as someone who can use reading, writing and calculate for community development.

In recent times, concerned scholars and individuals have raised alarm at the poor attitude of Nigerians to reading and the high rate at which Nigerian children are dropping out of schools even without being able to acquire basic literacy. Obanya (2004) citing UNICEF says that as at 2001/2002 academic session, some 45% of primary school age children are out of school. This is an unhealthy development. According to Obanya (2004) the UNICEF record shows that literacy rate had declined from 59% in 1990 to 49% in 2001. Literacy among women declined from 44% to 41% compares very unfavourably with countries like South Africa, (84%) Kenya (79%) Cameroon (72 %) and Ghana 68%. This is a very disheartening trend.

The implications of this is that a large number of Nigerians including youths are gradually becoming illiterates and would not be able to develop themselves as well as their communities. They will not be able to read about their societal values or write anything about them and worse still, they will have no opportunity to learn about societal values of other places. There will be nothing to compare in terms of societal values across culture. This study therefore attempts to find out if there is any difference between the influence of reading and the cultivation of worthwhile attitude to societal values? In order to in-

vestigate the problems stated above, two general questions are raised

- (i) What are the contributions of reading towards the cultivation of positive attitude to societal values?
- (ii) Will reading shape the attitude of Nigerian readers towards positive societal values?

Research Questions

- i. Will Nigerian readers be able to develop positive attitude towards societal values through reading
- ii. Will reading assist in curbing social violence if the readers were able to identify the contemporary societal values whether they are desirable or not.

Research Hypotheses

As a result of the research questions raised above, the following research hypotheses were generated.

- i. There is no significant difference between the knowledge gained from reading and the development of positive attitude towards societal values by readers
- ii. There is no significant difference between knowledge gained from reading and ability or willingness to show attitude that can influence societal values negatively.
- iii. There is no significant difference in the knowledge gained from reading and the ability of the reader to identify the contemporary societal values whether they are desirable or not.

Literature Review

Reading is an activity that is desirable and every individual ought to equip himself with new knowledge, ideas, information about societal values, and contribute towards national development. Reading enhances understanding of oneself, one's environment and broadening one's knowledge about the world especially other people's ways of life, values and modern inventions.

The development of any nation is closely related to the level of the literate citizens in that society. To be literate means, one has to be educated and an educated citizen must be able to read, write and calculate in a particular language of instruction. Any person who is unable to read

and write is regarded as an illiterate no matter the level of knowledge and wisdom he possesses.

It is interesting that reading activity embraces almost all the four language skills when it is used as a study skill. Reading and listening are classified as receptive skills while writing and speaking are expressive skills. Unoh (1980) and Onukaogu (2002) observe that reading is the fulcrum or cornerstone of literacy and without it there cannot be literacy. This is a pointer to the fact that any nation that wants to develop must strive to inculcate good reading habits in her citizens. Reading therefore, ought to be given adequate attention at all levels of any educational programme: adult education programme inclusive.

Literacy should not be limited to English language which is a second language of most Nigerians. The government should endeavour to make Nigerians literate in their mother tongues. This, I believe, will be the quickest way to disseminate information to hundred of millions of Nigerians and will make information reach the people more effectively.

Literacy in the mother tongue will be the most effective way to introduce innovation in Nigerian situation where many languages are spoken. Already, there are primers written in Nigerian languages even for primary school children. Some of these reading books have messages written in form of poetry, prose and drama. The focus of some of the books is to sensitize the young ones about the societal values, thereby inform the children about the need to cultivate positive attitudes towards these values. Odunjo (1990) in his "Alawiye" series a Yoruba reading book for primary schools treated these values such as dint of hard work, diligence, honesty, respect, truthfulness and hospitality.

These themes are recurring themes in the books which are graded for each class of the primary schools. It is the responsibility of the Yoruba language teachers to teach these values written in form of poetry, prose or drama and draw out the lessons to be learnt from these texts.

The attitude of Nigerians nowadays towards their mother tongues is becoming worrisome because some parents will not buy the prescribed textbooks in the mother tongue for their children. Many language teachers therefore find it difficult to teach the mother tongues in the primary and secondary schools. The worrisome aspect is that most Nigerian parents now struggle to

make sure that their children acquire English language as their first language hence; they speak English language to these children from birth even when such parents are bad models. This paves way for the children to learn a lot of sub-standard English language which may be difficult for teachers of English language to correct when the children get to school?

In addition to the above, many parents now give their children foreign names which are against our culture. In some parts of Nigeria, especially the Western part, names have cultural significance and identity. When parents start to give foreign names such as Praise, Faithful, Miracle and so on to children such children will lose their cultural identity gradually. One wonders whether the parents in these categories have lost their sense of societal values in terms of the significance of names. Perhaps if these people are literate in the mother tongue and read literature in mother tongue they may cherish their culture.

The Nigeria government is not doing enough to promote literacy in Nigerian languages. Language experts like Bamgbose (1994), Achebe (1987) shared this opinion. Nigeria government has failed to make Nigerian languages serve their rightful role in national development because they look for quick returns and investments. Languages do not yield immediate results and when the results come they are not quantifiable in terms of hard statistics. Many governments worldwide have invested in language not only because of the benefits its proper use can bring but because of the social turmoil which can arise from ignoring it.

Literacy in the mother tongues should be encouraged beyond primary school. It has to be intensified in the adult literacy classes and secondary schools. The goal of literacy programmes should be geared towards societal values in order to train Nigerian citizens to cherish and develop positive attitude towards their societal values. Nigeria can borrow a leaf from Lebanese, where education is used to promote her societal values. Held (2005) says that Lebanese value individualism which contributes to their creativity and inventiveness. They also value close family relations, loyalty to family and friends and honour are considered as important. This value system according to Held reflects in the dressing pattern of Lebanese. They had contact with the Western culture and Muslim, they read about them and imbibe their modes of dressing.

Nigerians can use reading to change poor attitudes to societal values. For instance, before the arrival of Europeans Nigerians taught their children informally about their culture, honesty, hard work, peaceful coexistence with neighbours, religion and traditional festivals. Some society gave more formal instruction about society and culture as part of young people's rites of passage into adulthood. Nowadays, the attitudes of Nigerians are polluted either by their contacts with Western culture or misplacement of value.

The resultant effects of this are the rates of insecurity in the country, violent behaviours, massive rigging during election, assassination and arson to mention a few.

One can argue that most of the perpetrators of these acts are literate, it may be true but in what language? The answer is not far fetched, one will say in foreign language labelled second language, English language in Nigeria.

It is observed that some Nigerians especially the youths are not reading materials written in their mother tongues hence they cannot appreciate most of the values discussed in the literature written in their mother tongues. Nigerian children are also denied the benefits of the lessons to be learnt from course books designed for their use in the primary schools. For instance, many parents are sending their children to private nursery and primary schools where emphases are placed on the English language at the expense of the mother tongue. The pupils who attend these schools find it difficult to read in their mother tongues hence cannot retrieve any information from books written in Nigeria languages.

The Nigerian elites are playing upon the intelligence of the less privileged and perhaps illiterate masses. Nigerian literacy level was put as 70.7% as at 2005 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). This means that about 30% of Nigerians are illiterates. This percentage is still very high and perhaps responsible for the high rate of poverty and violent behaviours among Nigerian youths.

Literacy geared towards functionality and re-orientation towards societal values is desirable for Nigerians. Nigerian youths must be encouraged to read literature and other materials written in their mother tongues. This may be a panacea to curbing antisocial behaviour like, arson, assassination, armed robbery and hostage taking which is a recent development in Nigeria.

These vices are condemned in strong terms in Nigerian culture as anti societal value.

Most Nigerian folklore and tales indicated that most of these anti social behaviours were detested and had no place in Nigerian culture. Anybody who indulged in practising such are sanctioned including his family. Most of these values that are accommodated within Nigerian culture are written in the books written in the mother tongues.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive research in which survey method was used. The researcher used questionnaire and interview to elicit information from the subjects.

Population of the Study: The population for this study is the literate adults in Ekiti State. The study focused on this category of people because they are literate and would know the advantages of literacy. They may be in position to identify the influence of literacy on the development of positive attitude towards societal values.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample for the study was randomly selected from urban and rural areas of Ekiti State. Two hundred literate adults' males and females were randomly selected for the study.

Research Instrument: The research instrument used for the study was a questionnaire which contains twenty items based on the three research questions and hypotheses generated for the purpose of the study. The questionnaire is a self-reporting type which allows the respondent to choose among four level options on likert rating scale, strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree and disagree. The rating points are 4, 3, 2, 1. respectively. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, each part addresses specific problems such as the influence of the knowledge gained in reading on societal values, the development of positive attitudes towards societal values and to detest wrong attitudes toward societal values such as violent behaviours, immoral dressing, dishonesty, corruption, and all that are inimical to national development, Others are whether literacy in Nigeria languages will enable the readers to identify: the contemporary societal values, whether these values are desirable, or not, and discouraging societal values that are undesirable.

The face and content validity of the instrument were established by curriculum specialists at the University of Ado-Ekiti. The reliability test was carried out on adults who would not take part in the main study. The data collected from their responses was analysed using Pearson product moment correlation. A reliability correlation co-efficient of 0.70 was obtained which was considered good enough for the study.

Methods of data collection and Analysis:

The researcher personally visited the adults in their place of works, and administered the questionnaires on the subjects. The subjects were encouraged to fill the questionnaires and return them to the researcher the same day. The questionnaire which was constructed on a likert rating scale was analyzed by the researcher and subjected to t-test statistics tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 states that there is no significant difference between the knowledge gained from reading and the development of positive attitudes towards societal values by readers.

The table 1 shows that the calculated t.32.77 is greater than the table value 1.96 which implies that there is significance difference between the

knowledge gained from reading and the development of positive attitudes towards societal values.

Hypothesis two states that there is no significant difference between knowledge gained from reading and ability to shun undesirable societal values.

Table 2 shows that the calculated t.23.19 is greater than the table value 1.96

This simply implies that significant difference exists between the knowledge gained from reading and ability to shun undesirable societal values.

The third hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between the knowledge gained from reading and the ability of the reader to identify the contemporary societal values whether they are desirable or not.

Table 3 shows that there is significant difference between the knowledge gained from reading and the ability of the readers to identify the contemporary societal values and determine whether they are desirable or not.

DISCUSSION

The result of the data analysed on hypothesis one shows that there is significant difference between the knowledge gained from reading and

Table 1: Difference between knowledge derived from reading and the cultivation of positive attitude towards societal values.

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	df	t.cal	t.value	Sig
Knowledge gain	206	14.91	2.11	199	32.77	1.96	.000
Attitude to societal value	200	5.09	2.12				

P<0.05

Table 2: Differences between knowledge gained from reading and ability to shun undesirable societal values.

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	df	t.cal	t.value	Sig
Knowledge from reading	200	14.42	2.73	199	23..19	.000	.000
Ability to show undesirable values	200	5.54	2.63				

P<0.05

Table 3: Difference between the knowledge gained from reading and identification of desirable values

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	df	t.cal	t.value	Sig
Knowledge gain from reading	200	13.70	3.32	199	10.90	1.96	.000
Attitude to societal value	200	6.2	3.27				

P<0.05

the development of positive attitude towards societal values.

The respondents agreed that they derive knowledge from the materials they read and are aware of the societal values. They equally stated that they read more materials written in English language than those written in Nigerian languages news papers inclusive. The responses of the subjects corroborated the claim of Held (2005) that the Lebanese education exposed them to the values of their country and that of other countries especially when they read foreign materials.

The results of the data further showed that the knowledge gained from reading were not fully utilized positively by some readers like the Lebanese. These reflected in their responses to the issue of wrong attitudes to societal values. The Nigerians values such as honesty, hardworking, good dressing, doing what is right at the right time are not often reflected in foreign materials read by respondents. Most of the respondents claimed to have read more detective stories than other forms of literature. Some of the respondents claimed not to have paid serious attention to books such as "Alawiye" written in their mother tongue. The respondents agreed that most people who demonstrated negative attitudes to societal values were mostly literate people. The reason could be due to the kind of materials they read most often.

The result of the data analysed in respect of the second hypothesis showed that there was a significant difference between reading and readers willingness to shun negative values. The analyses of the responses indicated that readers knew societal values but most of them are unwilling to shun the negative aspect of societal values. It is true that Nigeria value wealth accumulated through hard work but many Nigerians today do not care about the ways people are acquiring their wealth. Those who exhibited wealth suddenly were accommodated. This is responsible for the crude means through which people are acquiring wealth today. This finding support the claim of Bamigbose (1994) that the Nigerian government did not pay serious attention to the development of the Nigerian languages therefore failed to make Nigerian languages serve their rightful roles. Some of the roles were exposing readers to the Nigerian values, teaching young and adult to develop good moral, friendliness and cherish dignity of labour.

The third hypothesis showed that there is significant difference between knowledge gained from reading and the reader's ability to identify the desirability of some of the societal values.

The findings from the investigation conducted showed that reading is a worth-while activity and readers will always gain immensely from material read. It showed that the type of material read could influence the attitude of the readers. The finding corroborates the submission of Onukaogu (2002) that reading is the fulcrum or cornerstone of literacy and without it there cannot be literacy. If a reader read a little about Nigerian culture, he could develop negative attitude as a result of foreign literature especially when he had little knowledge of his own culture. This kind of negative influence is reflected in the character of some Nigerian Youths who always go about near naked. Nudity is abhorred in Nigerian culture especially where this research was carried out.

Other aspects in which reading had influences on societal values are in the area of attitude to work. Nigerian cherished dedication to work but Nigerians nowadays are perfect at cutting corners, only very few want to amass their wealth through dint of hard work. Therefore, we often heard of fast guys, clever guys etc. These wrong attitudes to societal values are responsible for the high rate of social violence, armed robbery and corruption. In most cases, these acts are perpetrated by people who are literate but are influenced negatively from the type of foreign materials they read and the habit cultivated through reading these various materials.

The results show that, in most Nigerian primary schools, books written in Nigerian languages are available but the attitudes towards the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages is poor. Investigation revealed that most parents do not normally buy textbooks written in Nigerian languages for their wards. This made the teaching of Nigerian languages in these schools difficult.

A close observation showed that the reading materials designed for the primary school children are very rich in its handling. Nigerian culture and values, such as stories, poems, plays are written to sensitize and teach young ones about their culture and values. The books are written for Nigerian audience unlike foreign books which are written for foreign audience and

are promoting foreign culture which may not agree with the nature of our culture.

CONCLUSION

The primary school pupils and secondary school students should be made to read materials written in Nigerian languages while the teachers should draw out the moral lessons in the materials. This will create awareness about societal values in the minds of the students. In addition, lesson learnt from such materials will sink into the minds of the learners and guide their behaviours later in life. Some of the stories, poems and play will show the readers that Nigerian society detests anti-social behaviours and perpetrators of such behaviours are sanctioned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings of the study, it is recommended that, children, youths and adults should be encouraged to read more of materials written in Nigerian languages. Teachers in the primary schools should be encouraged to teach the materials written in the textbooks meant for the children and draw out moral lessons from what the pupils have read. Supplementary reading materials that discuss our societal values

must be made available for the learners at all levels. Parents should be encouraged to change their attitudes to Nigerian languages and buy books for their wards.

REFERENCES

- Achebe C 1987. Children's Literature in Africa. *A paper presented at the 1987 Harare Book Fair Seminar on African Children Literature*. Aug 25
- Bamigbose A 1994. *Language and the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hale PM 1993. *Teaching English as Foreign Language*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Held CC 2005. Lebanon: (Country) Microsoft Encarta® 2006.
- Hillerich RL 1998. *Toward an Assessable, Definition of Literacy*. London: Henry Routhledge and Paul Kegan.
- Obanya P 2004. *Education for the Knowledge Economy*. Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers.
- Ogunjo JF 1990. *Alawiye Apa keji*. Ibadan: Longman Publishers.
- Onukaogu CE 2002. Developing Effective Readings Skills. In: Mansaray, A. Osokoya O. (Eds.): *Curriculum Development at the Turn of the Century. The Nigerians Experience*. Ibadan: Teachers Education Department, Pp. 66-78.
- Roland W 1992. *Studying Your Community*. New York: Russel Sage Foundations.
- Unoh SO 1980. The Role of Language Arts in Intellectual Development. *Inaugural Lecture*. Ibadan: Ibadan University.